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Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MANILA 2940

LIMDIS

EA ALSO FOR AMBASSADOR NEWSOM

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, RP
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS PHILIPPINE STYLE 1978

REF: MANILA 2770

1. SUMMARY: THE RESULTS OF THE FORTHCOMING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE VIRTUALLY CERTAIN. OPPOSITIONISTS WILL LIKELY WIN BUT A FEW SEATS, AND PRESIDENT MARCOS WILL BE ASSURED OF AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE NEW INTERIM PARLIAMENT. THIS BODY, IN TURN, IS EXPECTED TO BE LITTLE MORE THAN ADVISORY IN CHARACTER AND UNDER FULL MARCOS CONTROL. IT IS NOT PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL, IN THE CONTEXT OF MARTIAL LAW, TO DWELL ON THE "FAIRNESS" OF THE CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTIONS. WHILE THE POLLING ITSELF COULD BE REASONABLY VALID, THIS HAS LIMITED SIGNIFICANCE WHEN VIEWED IN THE UNBALANCED POLITICAL SETTING. THERE MAY BE SOME POSITIVE MEANING IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS ITSELF IN PROVIDING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE OPPOSITION TO SPEAK OUT AND SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES. BUT THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE WILL BE WHERE THESE ELECTORAL DEVELOPMENTS REPRESENT A MILESTONE TOWARD DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES. END SUMMARY.

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2. CAMPAIGNING FOR THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA (IBP), BILLED AS AN INTERIM NATIONAL LEGISLATURE, BEGAN FEBRUARY 17, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DEADLINE FOR FILING OF CANDIDACY. IT MAY BE USEFUL FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN TO OUTLINE THE PARAMETERS OF THE CURRENT CONTEST, THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES AND THEIR POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

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A. POLITICAL ARITHMETIC

3. AT STAKE ON ELECTION DAY APRIL 7 WILL BE 165 ELECTIVE SEATS IN THE 200 SEAT IBP WITH REGIONAL VOTING BY 14 DISTRICTS. IN ADDITION TO THE PRESIDENT'S SEAT, TWENTY SEATS WILL BE FILLED BY HIGH-RANKING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS APPOINTED BY MARCOS. FORUTEEN MEMBERS WILL BE SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVES (YOUTH, INDUSTRIAL LABOR, AGRICULTURAL LABOR) TO BE SELECTED AFTER APRIL 7 THROUGH A SEPARATE ELECTORAL PROCESS NOT YET FULLY SPELLED OUT. LIKE THE APPOINTED MEMBERS, THE SECTORAL REPRESENTATIVES ARE EXPECTED TO BE MARCOS LOYALISTS. THUS, THE PRO-MARCOS FORCES NEED WIN ONLY 67 SEATS, OR 41 PERCENT OF THE 165 SEATS AT STAKE ON APRIL 7, TO GIVE THEM AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE IBP. SINCE IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WILL WIN MORE THAN A SCORE OF SEATS AT THE OUTSIDE (AND PROBABLY CONSIDERABLY LESS), PRESIDENT MARCOS IS VIRTUALLY ASSURED OF AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE IBP. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE ARE PROJECTING THAT, FOR PURPOSES OF CREDIBILITY, MARCOS WILL "ARRANGE" FOR PERHAPS 5 TO 7 OPPOSITIONIST CANDIDATES TO WIN IN METRO MANILA. (WHETHER AQUINO WOULD BE PERMITTED TO WIN IS AN INTRIGUING QUESTION.)

4. THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS (COMELEC) ANNOUNCED THAT CONFIDENTIAL

623 CANDIDATES HAVE FILED, 185 OF WHOM WILL VIE FOR THE 21 SEATS AT STAKE IN METRO MANILA. TWENTY-SIX POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE REGISTERED, BUT ONLY TWO ARE OF NATIONAL CONSEQUENCE, THE KILUSANG BAGONG LIPUNAN (KBL) AND THE LAKAS NG BAYAN (LABAN). THE PRO-MARCOS KBL HAS PRESENTED AN ALMOST FULL SLATE, CONTESTING 164 OF THE 165 SEATS AT STAKE (THE SEAT ALLOTTED TO PRESIDENT MARCOS' HOME DISTRICT IN ILOCOS SUR HAS BEEN LEFT VACANT). LABAN, THE ONLY CREDIBLE, RECOGNIZABLE OPPOSITION HAS FIELDED 21 CANDIDATES, ALL IN METRO MANILA. TO COMPENSATE FOR THE OPPOSITION'S PULL-BACK TO METRO MANILA, PRESIDENT MARCOS' POLITICAL LIEUTENANTS HAVE ENCOURAGED THE FORMATION OF PSEUDO-OPPOSITION GROUPS IN THE PROVINCES TO SPAR WITH THE KBL. THE RESULT HAS BEEN A PROLIFERATION OF SMALL REGIONAL PARTIES WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL SUPPORT. NONE OF THESE PARTIES IS LIKELY TO BE A FACTOR, ALTHOUGH

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
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IT IS CONCEIVABLE THEIR MEMBERS MAY WIN SOME SEATS.

B. THE PRIZE

5. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE ELECTORAL EXERCISE IS SEATS IN A QUASI-PARLIMENT OF UNCERTAIN PURPOSE AND INDEFINITE DURATION. ONE ELECTED THE IBP MUST, UNDER THE 1973 CONSTITUTION AS AMENDED BY THE OCTOBER 1976 REFERENDUM/ PLEBISCITE, BE CONVENED WITHIN 30 DAYS BY PRESIDENT MARCOS. HOWEVER, MARCOS CONTINUES TO EXERCISE LEGISLATIVE POWERS UNTIL MARTIAL LAW IS LIFTED. ONLY HE CAN DECIDE WHEN TO LIFT MARTIAL LAW. TO THE EXTENT HE SHARES LEGIALATIVE POWERS WITH THE IBP, IT WILL BE ON HIS TERMS. EVEN AFTER MARTIAL LAW IS LIFTED, MARCOS CAN LEGISLATE BY DECREE IF THE IBP "FAILS OR IS UNABLE TO ACT ADEQUATELY ON ANY MATTER FOR ANY REASON THAT IN HIS JUDGEMENT REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ACTION." THEORETICALLY, THE IBP IS AN INTERIM BODY WHICH WILL DRAW UP RULES GOVERING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT LEGISLATURE. IN PRACTICE THE IBP COULD BE CONVERTED INTO A PERMANENT LEGISLATURE WITH THE STROKE OF MARCOS' PEN. ACCORDINGLY, THE IBP SEEMS LIKELY TO BE LITTLE MORE THAN AN ADVISORY BODY SIMILAR TO THE BATASANG
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BAYAN WHICH IT SUPERCEDES. NEEVERTHELESS, IT WILL BE THE ONLY POLITICAL GAME IN TWON, AND ASPIRING POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN SCRAMBLING FOR SEATS AND, ASSUMING THE ELECTION OF A FEW OPPOSITIONISTS, THE IBP COULD PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR SOME CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS,

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6. ONLY THE 21 LABAN CANDIDATES CAMPAIGNING IN
MANILA ARE OF SUFFICIENT STATURE AND COMMITMENT THAT
THEIR ELECTION WOULD BE CONSIDERED A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL
STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME, ALTHOUGH THERE
PRESUMABLY IS A SMALL NUMBER OF REAL INDEPENDENTS AMONG THE
437 CANDIDATES OUTSIDE THE KBL AND LABAN SLATES WHO MAY BEAR
WATCHING. IN METRO MANILA, A KBL SLATE HEADED BY IMELDA
ROMUALDEZ MARCOS IS SQUARED OFF AGAINST A LABAN TICKET LED
BY BENIGNO AQUINO, JR. MRS. MARCOS AND AQUINO HAVE
A HISTORY OF MUTUAL ANIMOSITY GOING BACK AT LEAST AS FAR AS
1965, SO THE CONTEST IS BOUND TO BE INTERESTING. IN THE
OPPOSITION'S FAVOR ARE A) MANILA'S PRE-MARITAL LAW
TRADITION OF VOTING AGAINST THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION;
B) THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE STUDENT AND INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY
RIPE FOR ANTI-MARCOS MOBILIZATION; C) THE POSSIBLE EXPLOITA-
TION OF URBAN LOWER AND MIDDLE-CLASS ECONOMIC DISSATIS-
FACTION; AND D) THE APPEAL OF AQUINO AND THE
EXPLOITATION OF HIS DETENTION. IN THE KBL'S FAVOR ARE
A) THE SUPER STAR APPEAL OF PRESIDENT AND MRS.
MARCOS, B) CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT MACHINERY, WITH THE
CONCOMITANT ABILITY TO ALLOCATE OR WITHHOLD RESOURCES,
AND C) CONTROL OF THE MASS MEDIA. BY RUNNING
LY## IN
METRO MANILA, LABAN HOPES TO LIMIT VOTE FRAUD, SINCE
THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO STATION WATCHERS AT EVERY POLLING
CENTER. EVEN IN MANILA, HOWEVER, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT
FOR THE LABAN TO ORGANIZE RALLIES, DISSEMINATE CAMPAIGN
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LITERATURE AND REACH THE ELECTORATE THROUGH THE MASS
MEDIA.

7. ASSUMING AQUINO REMAINS UNDER DETENTION
DURING THE CAMPAIGN, LABAN WILL HAVE TO RELY HEAVILY ON
THREE FORMER SENATORS, FRANCISCO "SOC" RODRIGO, RAMON
MITRA, AND ERNIE MACEDA, AND THE AQUINO FAMILY FOR RALLYING
MANILA VOTERS TO ITS CAUSE. RODRIGO, WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL
IN ORGANIZING THE OPPOSITION COALITION, IS AN ELOQUENT
SPOKESMAN KNOWN FOR HIS TAGALOG POEMS. MITRA, A NATIVE
OF PALAWAN, IS BRIGHT AND ENERGETIC WITH LITTLE POLITICAL
EXPERIENCE.

8. OTHER THAN AQUINO, PERHAPS THE MOST INTERESTING LABAN
CANDIDATE WILL BE MACEDA. BEFORE MARTIAL LAW, MACEDA
WAS A MARCOS CONFIDENT, SERVING FOR SEVERAL YEARS AS
PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARY. HE AHD
THE REPUTATION OF BEING MARCOS' "PROCURER," WHICH EARNED
HIM THE WRATH OF MRS. MARCOS AND EVENTUALLY LED TO HIS
OUSTER FROM MALACANANG. AFTER MARTIAL LAW MACEDA WROTE A

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POLITICAL COLUMN FOR THE EVENING POST, BUT MRS. MARCOS
FROCED HIS RESIGNATION FROM THAT JOB AS WELL, AND FOR THE
PAST TWO YEARS HE HAS BEEN IN LIMBO. HE REPORTEDLY PLEADED
WITH THE
OPPOSITIONISTS TO INCLUDE HIM IN THEIR SLATE, PRO-
MISING TO UTILIZE HIS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF MALACANANG
TO THE FULLEST IN THE CAMPAIGN. SEVERAL OPPOSITIONISTS

NOTE BY OC/T: ##AS RECEIVED.

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LIMDIS

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SUSPECTED MACEDA MIGHT BE A MARCOS INFORMER, BUT IN THE
END THEY COULD NOT RESIST TURNING HIM LOOSE AGAINST MARCOS.

9. TO OPPOSE LABAN, MRS. MARCOS HAS ASSEMBLED A TICKET
WHICH BLENDS ELDER STATESMEN, TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS, AND
TECHNOCRATS. IF THE KBL METRO MANILA CANDIDATES
HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON, IT IS THAT, WITH ONE OR TWO
EXCEPTIONS, THEY ARE PERSONAL FAVORITES OF THE METRO MANILA
GOVERNOR. IHTERESTINGLY, THE KBL METRO MANILA SLATE CONTAINS
A MUCH HIGHER PROPORTION OF "TECHNOCRATS" THAN THE PROVINCIAL
SLATES, WHERE THE OLD SOCIETY POLITICIANS ARE MUCH IN EVIDENCE.
13 OR 14 OF THE 21-MEMBER METRO MANILA KBL SLATE HAVE NEVER
BEFORE HELD ELECTIVE OFFICE.

10. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELECTION IS CONSIDERABLY IN THE
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER. FILIPINOS GENERALLY DO NOT SEEM TO
REGARD THE EXERCISE TO BE ONE OF MEANINGFUL POLITICAL CHOICE.
THIS ATTITUDE COULD INHIBIT THE ELECTORATE'S WILLINGNESS

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TO TAKE A STAND, EVEN BY SECRET BALLOT, IN A
CONTEST THAT DOES NOT SEEM TO MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE.
ON THE OTHER HAND THE PROCESS ITSELF COULD HAVE A CERTAIN
POSITIVE MEANING. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MARTIAL LAW
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THE ELECTIONS ARE OFFERING SOME STRUCTURED OPPORTUNITY
FOR THE OPPOSITION TO SPEAK OUT AND PRESENT ALTERNATIVES.
THEY MIGHT POSSIBLY IMPLANT SOME IDEANS AMONG THE ELECTORATE
WHICH COULD COME TO FRUITION LATER.
11. WE WILL BE SEEKING TO ASSESS THE "FAIRNESS" OF THE
CAMPAIGN AND THE ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME WE RECOGNIZE
THAT THE POLITICAL SETTING IS NOT IN ANY SENSE BALANCED, NOR
COULD IT BE IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES. THESE ARE ESSENTIALLY
THAT IN THE SIXTH YEAR OF MARTIAL LAW THE MARCOS POLITICAL
AUTHORITY HAS DECLARED AN ELECTION ON TERMS DECIDED BY IT,
WITH MEDIA CONTROLLED BY IT, TO BE CONDUCTED BY OFFICIALS
APPOINTED BY IT, UNDER A CONSTITUTION REWRITTEN AND INTER-
PRETED BY IT. IN THE NARROWEST SENSE THE POLLING PROCESS
COULD TURN OUT TO BE RELATIVELY "AFAIR" AND STILL FAIL TO
CONSTITUTE REAL CHOICE IN THE LARGER POLITICAL CONTEXT.

12. IN MANILA, THE OPTIMISTS SAY THAT THE ELECTION AND
THE CREATION OF AN IBP REPRESENT THE BEGINNING OF AN IRREVERSIBLE
AND STEADY MOVEMENT TOWARD NORMALCY EMBRACING A SUBSTANTIAL
RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES. THE PESSIMISTS MAINTAIN THAT
THESE ARE JUST MORE MARCOS' DEVICES TO EXTEND HIS AUTHORITARIAN
FAMILY RULE INDEFINITELY. IF PAST IS PROLOGUE, MARCOS
HIMSELF PROBABLY TENDS TO THE LATTER SCENARIO.
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